

OPENING STATEMENT

Good Morning,

Chairman McDonald, Chairman Lawlor and Members of this Honorable Committee:

My name is M. Nawaz Wahla. It is gratifying and humbling for me to appear before you today. I would first like to thank Governor Rell for this nomination and her expression of confidence in my ability to serve in this vital and visible role. I also thank this committee for its time and efforts in performing this important task.

By way of background, I grew up in a rural village in the Punjab province of Pakistan. My father was a diligent farmer. He worked tirelessly to care for my brothers, sisters, and myself after our mother's death a few short years following my birth. There was no electricity or running water at our farm. It was a one and half mile walk to the elementary school. My father had no formal education. He could not even write his own name. His pride in his children exceeded his means. He did all he could to make sure that I had the finest education possible.

I worked hard throughout high school and graduated with honors. Of my eight brothers and sisters, I am the only one to attend college. Once there, I focused rigorously on my course work and sought to achieve the highest academic levels.

In 1972, I was chosen as a cadet by the Pakistan Military Academy (PMA). Akin to Westpoint, the PMA is the training ground for officers in the Pakistani Army. In 1974, I graduated from the PMA and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Artillery Regiment. In 1984, I enrolled in the University Law College at the University of Punjab. During the day, I discharged my duties as an officer. My nights were filled with constitutional law, torts, and contracts. Although I did not realize it at the time, my enrolment in the law college was prescient as my life would soon be focused on law.

In early 1986, I suffered injuries in the line of duty while deployed in rural Pakistan. During routine patrol, my men and I were ambushed by a band of well-armed smugglers. Two men under my command were killed in action. My arm was shattered; a bullet was lodged mere centimeters from my heart. I was hospitalized for nine months.

The recovery period was long and difficult not just for me, but my family as well. Those nine months forced me to critically evaluate two clear paths before me. I selected the more difficult one: to begin anew with the law. My wife and three small children embarked on a global adventure. We followed my passion for the law to the shores of these United States.

In August of 1991, I received my Masters in Comparative Jurisprudence from the University of Texas School of Law in Austin, Texas. I put this degree to good use with a prestigious internship at the International Court of Justice within the Hague Academy of International Law in 1993. I returned to Texas after my internship for further study and in August of 1998 received my LLM from the University of Houston Law Center.

In 1999, I was admitted to the practice of law as an attorney in the State of Connecticut. Two days later, I opened my private practice in Hartford and appeared in my first case. Since that day, I have learned more about the law than I ever thought possible. I have continued to refine my skills at both the trial and appellate level. I have had the distinct privilege to make oral arguments before the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

My legal education and practical experience over the years has given me a vast wellspring of knowledge upon which I can rely. My appreciation for the principles of the law began thirty years ago. To this day, I remain committed to maturing and deepening it. I have represented clients from all walks of life in criminal defense, family, housing, civil action (both tort and contractual), immigration, and juvenile matters. I am particularly proud of the *pro bono* work I have done over the years. I am also very proud of the work I have done as Co-chair of the Bench Bar Committee of the Hartford County Bar Association and as a member of the Board of Directors. The profession of law is a jealous mistress that demands total commitment and sacrifice and I have experienced that demand first hand.

When I arrived in these United States twenty two years ago with my wife and three small children it was foreign and new. Now, with the passage of time, I can confidently conclude that the fateful decision I made was indeed the correct one. I have been blessed with a son and daughter both of whom were admitted to the practice of law in Connecticut. Our youngest child, a daughter, our pride and joy, has just finished her third year of medical school. I am equally blessed to have a dedicated and beautiful wife, with whom I have learned so much. It is through them that I have gained a pearl of wisdom about this great nation.

As both an army officer and attorney, I have learned to make reasoned decisions under pressure. I am confident that if confirmed I will discharge my duties with compassion, dignity, and respect to all those who may appear before me.

Since Governor Rell announced my nomination in September of this year, I have received countless messages from across the United States and abroad. They all share a story of pride in our system of laws. I have been deeply touched by each message. I am deeply humbled that my nomination is a source of inspiration.

I am incredibly thankful to my family, friends, and countless colleagues and mentors who have done so much to make this day possible. However, if this day has just a touch of sadness in it for me, it is because my father is not here to share it. He taught me that "*no dream is too big too dream.*" It is a true testament to the spirit of this nation that the son of a rural farmer would be given such an opportunity to serve the state of Connecticut.

Thank you for attention and patience. With that, it will be my pleasure to answer any questions you might have.